



NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK SAW THE SOCIETY THIEF'S BODY QUIVER WITH THE SHOCK, SWAY AND PLUNGE HEADLONG. - (CHAPTER CXXXVII.)



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NICK CARTER'S ADVENTURES.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER CXXX.

SPOONS IN HIS POCKETS.

Mr. Horatio Belden's splendid house, on Fifth avenue, was filled with a crowd of fashionable people.

It was late in the evening, and yet people kept coming and adding to the crush in parlors and dining-room.

The greatest crush was in the latter room, for refreshments were on the long table and guests and waiters were busy passing plates to the ladies.

Among the men present was one who stood quietly in a corner putting away a plate of ice cream.

He was meantime looking around the room, and presently his eyes brightened for an instant.

Then he began to edge his way into the crowd around the table.

Once when he was in reach of the table he put out his hand, but it was only to set down his empty plate.

After that he elbowed his way on again, keeping

his eyes all the time upon a man who stood close to the edge of the table.

This man had a heavy mustache and side whiskers, and he wore gold-rimmed eyeglasses.

The first man had got almost beside him when the second turned and began to edge his way out with a dish of ice cream held high so that it might not be spilled.

He could not go fast if he tried, and a moment later the first man touched him on the shoulder.

"Good-evening," he said.

They were then five or six feet from the table, but still in a thick crowd.

There was a perfect roar of chattering voices all around them, and they would have to speak loudly in order to be heard.

The second man looked around, with an expression of surprise, then turned away his head again and pressed on.

The first touched him again.

"Better step into the hall, where there's more room," he said quietly, but distinctly.

"I think you have the advantage of me," responded the other, coldly.

"There's another think coming to you, then," was the retort, "but it's true enough that I have the advantage of you."

No one near had heard this exchange of remarks, no one noticed the keen, determined look on the first man's face, or the pallor that crept on the second's.

For a moment they stood face to face, and so close that their bodies touched.

"Very well," said the second, "if you insist, I will join you in a moment."

He started to edge his way back to the table, as if to lay down his dish.

At that instant several ladies, who were making for the further end of the dining-room, came up and began to pass between them.

With a slight expression of annoyance, the first man stepped back to let them by.

The second did not try to go to the table, but took advantage of the opportunity to get further from the first and to go in a direction opposite to the hall.

As soon as the ladies were past, the first man pushed into the crush again, and, working a little more forcibly than before, soon caught up with the other.

"None of that!" he whispered, harshly. "Go where I told you to. Never mind the plate!"

As sometimes happens, a lane suddenly appeared in the crowd.

The second man instantly turned toward it, and as he did so, he threw the contents of his dish full in the first man's face.

That done, he dashed into the lane, and made a most desperate effort to force himself by the men and women at the end of it.

Imagine the excitement of the guests!

Ladies cried aloud, and men uttered exclamations of astonishment.

It was tenfold worse in a second.

The first man brushed the ice cream from his eyes and strode after the other.

Although people fell away before the second, he could not make rapid progress, for the very confusion caused men at a distance to push in that direction.

They wondered what was the matter, and wanted to find out.

Few, if any, guessed what was the matter, but they saw the two men come together.

The second, finding himself overtaken, wheeled about and struck savagely at the first, who parried the blow with considerable skill and returned it with one that caught the second on the mouth.

It displaced his heavy mustache, and those who were near enough saw that it stuck on the top of his nose, while one of his long side whiskers dropped down beneath his chin and the other skewed up beside his ear, sticking out like a horn.

Almost everybody shrank away from the pair.

Two men tried to interfere and stop the disgraceful row, but they were called off by Mr. Belden himself, who, fortunately, was standing near them.

It was over in a few seconds, that is, so far as the guests could see, and of all the guests there were comparatively few who had any view of the scrimmage.

The first man fought the second with a fierceness of a mad bull, and drove him steadily and rapidly from the room into the hall, and then down a flight of stairs to the basement.

Mr. Belden followed.

"Don't come," he cried to others; "I'll be back in a minute and tell you about it."

So, for a minute or two, the guests chatted excitedly.

When Mr. Belden returned from below, he rapped on the table to obtain silence, and said:

"My friends, the unpleasant occurrence that disturbed us all was due to the discovery by one of my friends that a sneak thief somehow had made his way into the house and was pocketing the tableware. I suppose I do not need to say that this friend of mine who made the discovery is a private

detective. He regrets very much that he was unable to get the stranger out without violence, and I regret it, too, but it is better that the thief should be captured. He is in the kitchen now, waiting for a policeman. We have searched him and found his pockets full of spoons."

There was a chorus of "Ahs!" and "Ohs!" at this.

"Fortunately," added Mr. Belden, with a smile, "we have a few spoons left. I think there are enough to go round, and I beg you for the sake of my wife and daughter to remain and forget what has happened!"

CHAPTER CXXXI.

MISS BELDEN'S DISCOVERY.

Of course, the detective was not Nicholas Carter, nor any one of that celebrated man's clever assistants. He was a good fellow as detectives go, faithful and brave, and with a good deal of shrewdness, as might be seen from his recognition of the sneak thief in that disguise.

But he could not manage things as well as the Carters.

Those who have become familiar with the methods of the great four know that not one of them would have failed to get the thief out of the dining-room without making a disturbance.

Nick probably would have let the man steal all he could, and then would have followed him from the house and made the arrest there.

The arrest was made, however, as described, and down in the kitchen the detective was putting the thief through a severe examination.

"Nixon," he said, that being the thief's name, "how did you get into the house?"

The thief was handcuffed, and the plunder that had been taken from his pockets was on a table beside him.

"I walked in," replied Nixon, impudently.

"Nonsense!"

"But what could be easier? The front door was wide open, men and women came in in droves——"

"You didn't come in that way."

"No?"

"You had a confederate."

"So?"

"Better make things easier for yourself——"

"By squealing? Guess again, boss."

The detective frowned, but the answer satisfied him that he was on the right track.

Nixon would not have spoken of "squealing," or looked so defiantly if he had not had a confederate.

Several servants were in the room, listening with the greatest interest.

"You had a confederate," repeated the detective.

"As he spoke he glanced as if carelessly at the group of servants.

"You know a lot, don't you?" retorted Nixon.

Instead of answering, the detective stooped and brought the thief's feet together.

Then he quickly put a steel clasp around his ankles and sprung the catch.

"You'll do for a minute or two," he said, and then addressing the servants: "I want you all to go out."

They started to withdraw.

"All but you," added the detective, beckoning to one of the men servants, who halted and looked greatly alarmed. "Come into the back room with me."

When they were alone the detective said:

"You let that man into the house."

The servant stared a moment, and his lips moved as if he would deny the charge.

Then he broke down.

"Don't be hard on me" he cried. "Who told you?"

"Never mind who told me. I want you to tell me all about it. I know everything. If you don't tell the truth it will go hard with you."

Frightened half to death, the servant at once confessed, telling how he had been bribed to let Nixon in at the back door after the reception was well under way.

"I didn't suppose he was a thief," whined the servant. "He said he was an intimate friend of Mr. Belden's, and wanted to surprise him."

"You never saw him before, I suppose?" remarked the detective, sarcastically.

"Never, sir, so help me!"

"All right, make the magistrate believe that if you can."

They returned to the kitchen, and just then the policeman who had been sent for arrived.

Mr. Belden came in with him.

"This is Billy Nixon, notorious sneak thief," said the detective, "and this is his confederate."

"What!" gasped Mr. Belden.

"I accused Nixon of having a confederate," explained the detective, "in the presence of several servants. This one immediately showed such signs of alarm that I suspected him and took him aside, when he confessed."

"But I didn't know that the man was a thief, Mr. Belden!" stammered the servant.

Mr. Belden shook his head when he had heard the servant's explanation.

"I cannot believe that," he said. "He must be locked up, too."

"Well," said the policeman, "you'll go around to the station to make complaint, I suppose?"

"I dislike to run away from my guests," replied Mr. Belden, "especially under the circumstances," and he looked at the detective.

"I can enter complaint for you," suggested the latter, "if you think there is no further need of my presence here."

"That's the best way out of it," responded Mr. Belden. "You see, after what has happened my guests wouldn't feel very comfortable if they should see you again, and I want them to forget what has occurred. If it were possible that there was another criminal in the house, he would have got out by this time."

"Undoubtedly," said the detective.

Therefore, the detective went with the policeman

and the two prisoners to the police station and did not return to the house that night.

The reception went on very pleasantly until midnight, by which time the guests began to depart.

Half-an-hour later all were gone, and the members of the family were making preparations to retire.

Miss Natalie Belden had gone to her mother's bedroom to put away the jewels she had been wearing during the evening.

Her mother had a strong, elegant cabinet in that room in which were drawers for holding jewel cases.

Mother and daughter had worn many gems that evening, but by no means all, or half, of what they owned.

Diamonds, pearls, rubies and the like, in costliest settings, had been left in the cabinet, and Mrs. Belden not only had kept the key with her, but had left the bedroom door locked also.

The girl, leaving her parents in the library where they had set down to rest a few moments after the last guest had gone, had taken the keys from her mother.

About a minute after she had gone upstairs she came running into the library.

Her face was pale, and she stammered when she tried to speak.

"Mamma! papa!" she gasped, "we have been robbed!"

"Of course," responded her father, jokingly, "but the thief didn't get away with anything. You were in the drawing-room at the time, but I supposed you had heard all about it."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Why," he began, "a sneak thief——"

"Oh!" she interrupted, "I know all about that, and I thought it was dreadful enough to have the party interrupted in such a dreadful way, but mamma's jewels—they are all gone!"

"What?" cried Mr. Belden, jumping up.

"All?" echoed Mrs. Belden.

"Every one!" said the girl. "The bedroom door was locked, but the cabinet doors had been broken

open. 'All the drawers are pulled out and there's nothing in them but the empty cases!'

Without a word, Mr. Belden ran upstairs to see for himself.

His wife and daughter followed him.

It was as Miss Natalie had said.

Not a gem of their great collection was left, except those they had worn during the evening.

Mr. Belden made a hasty examination of the windows.

The catches were all fastened.

The thief, then, had not come in through a window.

"Ah!" he cried, "what's the use of employing private detectives?"

Mrs. Belden and Natalie had dropped into chairs, overwhelmed by their loss.

"What can you do about it, Horatio?" asked Mrs. Belden, faintly.

"Notify the police, and at once," he returned.

"And must we have them here?"

"Decidedly yes! It will be annoying, and it will be in the newspapers, of course, but I cannot let property to the value of thousands be taken without making every effort to recover it."

CHAPTER CXXXII.

A DAYLIGHT SHOT.

The morning papers had brief and very incorrect accounts of the jewel robbery at Mr. Belden's.

The police had been notified at such a late hour that the reporters could not get all the facts, but such as were presented interested Nick Carter a great deal.

He left the house immediately after breakfast, and went to headquarters, for the sake of getting the whole story without having to wait for the evening papers.

When he knew as much as the police did about the matter, which was no more than has been told here, he got into a cab and was driven to the resi-

dence of Mrs. Theodore Van Pelt, a fashionable woman of great wealth.

A servant took his card and Nick waited in the reception-room.

Presently Mrs. Van Pelt came in, looking surprised and somewhat disturbed.

"Mr. Carter?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes, madam," he answered. "You are annoyed to receive a call from a detective?"

"Hardly that," she responded, "but surprised."

"Especially as this detective is one you never saw before."

"True."

"Permit me, then, to state my business briefly. There is to be a reception at your house this evening."

"Yes, Mr. Carter, but I have already engaged a private detective——"

Nick interposed with a gesture.

"I do not come to ask an engagement," he said, gravely. "When I am wanted, my clients come to me."

"The fact is, Mr. Carter," she returned, "I had that idea of you, for, of course, your name is familiar to me, and that is what made my surprise the greater. I could think of no possible reason for your call."

"Let me tell you, then. I want an invitation."

"An invitation?"

"Precisely; for myself and one of my assistants, who will pose as my daughter. I need hardly add that we shall not be present under our real names."

He smiled as if the favor he asked was the simplest matter in the world.

"I take it for granted that this is detective work of some kind——"

"Surely!" exclaimed Nick. "I would not think of coming here for any other purpose. Miss Jones and I wish to be present merely as your guests. I will be Carlo Spontini, an Italian banker, if you like, and Miss Jones will be my daughter, Felicia. You will not have to introduce us to anybody, for I will

arrange all that with two of your guests, Mr. George Black and Mr. William Preston——”

“Why, how did you know they were to be here?”
Nick smiled.

“Frankly,” he answered, “for I do not care to mystify you, I asked them.”

“Then this is no sudden plan of yours?”

“Not at all. I began to think about it the day after the robbery at the Wendells’ reception last week. I suppose you know what happened at the Beldens’ reception last night?”

“I do, but I am shocked to hear you speak with so much confidence. It is as if you suspected one of my invited guests.”

Mrs. Van Pelt was too amazed to speak.

“The robbery at the Wendells,” continued Nick, “though a small affair, was of the same kind as that at the Beldens. I believe that the same hand was in both, and that the man who robbed the Beldens will be in your house this evening.”

He waited a moment to let his words sink in, and added:

“I give you my word that I will not arrest the man in your house. I will not interfere with your detective, and I may prevent the loss of some of your property.”

“Well,” she said, after a little thought, “I consent. But what about George Black and Will Preston?”

“Both are friends of mine, and I have taken them part way into my confidence, for, as I have handled cases for them, I know that I can trust to their good sense. They will be near when Signor Carlo Sponsini and his daughter enter your parlor.”

“I see. They will save me from telling fibs about you.”

“Yes.”

“Then you and Miss Jones will be welcome. Shall I speak to my detective about it?”

“No! I will tell Foster about it afterward.”

“Foster! Then you know who my detective is, too!”

“I know you haven’t employed anybody else since Wilson died.”

Mrs. Van Pelt held up her hands.

“Don’t say anything more to me!” she cried. “It actually scares me to think of a stranger knowing so much about my affairs.”

He smiled, told her that she had nothing to fear from him, and, after a few more polite words, he took his departure.

The cab was waiting for him, and Nick told the driver to go to William Preston’s place of business.

That gentleman had just arrived at his office when Nick was shown in.

“Mr. Preston,” said Nick, “I am going to play that game I spoke of the other day.”

“Indeed? Then you think you really know who the thief is?”

“I feel very sure of it. To-night’s work will tell. I shall be present at Mrs. Van Pelt’s as Carlo Sponsini, an Italian banker.”

“And I am to be an old friend, eh?”

“Yes. Think you can play the part?”

“There ought to be no difficulty. Everybody knows that I have traveled a good deal.”

“We will arrive at ten-thirty. Be near Mrs. Van Pelt at that time. She will present us, you can recognize me and my daughter, and we can go to a corner to talk things over. Understand?”

“Perfectly, Carter.”

“And you will speak to Black about it?”

“Yes, indeed. I shall meet him at lunch.”

“All right, then. That will save me some time.”

Nick said “good-morning,” and went back to his cab, telling the driver to take him home.

It was about half-past eleven when he arrived there.

As the cab stopped, the door of Nick’s house opened and his wife came out.

She was just starting for the shopping district.

“How lucky!” she cried. “If you don’t want the cab any longer, Nick, I’ll take it.”

“You’re welcome to it, my dear,” he answered, getting out.

His foot was yet on the cab step, when there was a sharp report from across the street.

It was followed instantly by a tick! against the cab wheel, and a bullet glanced from it, flew to the door and buried itself in the frame within a foot of Mrs. Carter's head.

CHAPTER, CXXXIII.

A SWELL SUSPECT.

The great detective's face became white as snow.

There had been rare moments in his life when Nick Carter was frightened.

Those were when his wife or some dear friend was in danger.

A glance showed him that she was unhurt, but the color was slow in coming back to his cheeks.

She was greatly startled, but she stood quietly, waiting with perfect confidence for him to tell her what to do, if anything.

"You'd better go in, Edith," he said at once, and his voice, though low, trembled.

"And you?" she inquired, as she turned to obey.

"I shall be busy, and I need the cab. Tell Patsy to meet me at Sixth avenue and Twenty-third street."

While speaking, Nick had his right hand to his face.

"Have you been badly hurt, sir?" asked the cabman, who was shivering with fright.

The man supposed from the position Nick took and the way he swayed from left to right that the bullet had struck him.

"No," replied Nick, coolly, now that his wife was in the house, "I haven't been hit, and there's no further danger. Somebody has been very careless. Drive around the next corner in a hurry and stop there."

He jumped from the cab, and the driver whipped up, glad to get away from the place.

Nick looked across the street as the cab started, and then settled back in the seat and put into his pocket the little mirror in which he had been examining the house opposite his own, while he was standing with his back to it.

That was the action that made him put his hand to his head and sway from side to side.

He had been holding the mirror so that it was concealed in the palm of his hand.

The mirror had shown him all he wanted to see for the present.

When the cab got around the corner and stopped, it was in front of a real estate office.

Nick went into the office, having first paid the driver and dismissed him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Allen," he said to the real estate agent; "I want to speak to you privately."

"This way, Mr. Carter," and the agent took him to an inner room.

"Who occupies the house opposite mine?" asked Nick.

"Exactly opposite, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"Why! that has been vacant for months. Didn't you know it?"

"I knew it looked unoccupied. I suppose you have tried to let it."

"Indeed I have, but without success."

"What do you do when somebody asks about the house?"

"Show it to the party."

"Do you go to the house with him?"

"Sometimes. When I am busy, and there is no clerk to spare, I give the inquirer the keys."

"I thought so."

"Is there something wrong, Mr. Carter?"

"There is. I'll tell you in a minute. Who asked to look at the house this morning?"

"Nobody."

"Sure?"

"I think so. I'll ask my clerks."

"Do so, please."

Mr. Allen went into the general office, and returned in a moment to say that nobody had inquired for that house during the morning.

"The last inquiry we had was five days ago," he said.

"Who was it?"

"Nobody we knew. He said his name was Brown. and that he came from Philadelphia."

"Did you go to the house with him?"

"No. He took the keys."

"How long was he gone?"

"About half-an-hour."

"I suppose he said when he came back that the house didn't suit him?"

"Something of that kind."

"And he brought back all the keys?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can you describe him?"

Mr. Allen thought a moment.

"Medium height," he answered, presently, "blue serge business suit, derby hat, full black beard, cut close, and he wore smoked glasses."

"Pretty good description."

"Well, when I give a man keys to a house I try to fix his looks, and this man is easily remembered because his smoked glasses gave his face a rather unusual appearance."

"And, of course, you haven't seen him since."

"No."

"Well, Mr. Allen, somebody, and I guess it was your man Brown, tried to kill me as I arrived home just now."

"Good gracious!"

Nick's voice shook with feeling.

"My wife," he continued, "was standing in the doorway, and the bullet meant for me went into the woodwork close beside her. It was fired from the empty house."

"Shocking, Mr. Carter! Horrible!"

"It might have been worse, you see, but it's bad enough. To think that my wife should be subjected to such peril! However, it's no fault of yours, Mr. Allen. I didn't come here to complain. You'll find a cracked pane of glass in the first floor front window, and a bullet hole through it. That shows that the scoundrel stood pretty far back in the room."

"I suppose so," stammered the agent, greatly disturbed, "but why do you guess that it was this Mr. Brown?"

"Simply because he was the last man to look at the house. The fact that he concealed his eyes makes the guess seem a good one."

"Well, is there anything I can do? Of course, I want to make an investigation."

"I shall send my assistant, Patsy, to you. You know him. Follow his directions."

"I will do so."

"Now," said Nick, as if changing the subject, "you have some flats to let on East Sixty-fourth street, between Madison and Lexington avenues, haven't you?"

"Yes; I'm agent for a row of buildings there."

"I should like the use of a top-story flat in any one of those buildings for a little time."

"Certainly, Mr. Carter. Will you take the keys?"

"If you have them here."

"I have," and Mr. Allen took them from a rack beside his desk. "I will notify the janitor," he added, "that that flat is let. What name shall I tell him?"

"Well," answered Nick, smiling, "tell him Brown. That name will do just as well for me as for the man who tried to kill me."

This was the end of their talk, and Nick walked to Sixth avenue and Twenty-third street, where he found Patsy waiting for him.

They took a private room in a restaurant near by, and when luncheon had been brought in and the waiter had gone, Nick began:

"I suppose my wife told you what had happened?"

"Yes," said Patsy.

"My first fear was for her, my second that the plan I have made for to-night had been foreseen. I haven't told you much about that."

"No. All I know is that you believe the gang we have been working against is at the back of these society robberies, and that you hope to reach the boss, the fellow who is Higher Up."

"That's it. He's still in the dark, and I don't be-

is lieve he's the man who commits these robberies in Ir. swell houses. That thief is simply the agent of Higher Up, unless I'm greatly mistaken. I mean at to find out to-night, and when this attempt was made es to shoot me, I feared that Higher Up had tumbled to my scheme."

I "You don't think so now?"

"No, though I do believe that Higher Up set the trap for me this morning. It's reasonable to suppose that such a clever fellow as he is has seen that I am sacrificing everything else to work against him."

"Yes. Men who were not so clever as he is have suspected that before, and have tried to put you out of the way."

"Indeed they have, but I don't remember quite such a bold attempt as this. Now, I don't intend to have Edith's life risked again. For that reason, as well as to mask my movements to-night, I am going to live somewhere else. Chick will be with me. Before I get through I will tell you what to say to him and Ida. You will have to look up the man who fired at me."

"I supposed so."

Nick then related the conversation he had had with the real estate agent.

"Go to Allen," he continued, "and get the keys to the empty house. Of course, you will search the house, and you will find that the man who fired had all his plans laid for getting out unseen the instant the shot was fired. You can probably trace him through the locksmith who made a duplicate key for him."

"That couldn't have been done in half-an-hour."

"Couldn't it? Look around and see, Patsy. It's clear enough, anyway, that the rascal entered the house during the night. To do that he must have had a key. Find where he got it."

"Where shall I report to you?"

"I don't know yet."

Here Nick gave Patsy the number of the flat he had engaged.

"I don't want you to go there to locate before to-morrow morning," he said, "and by that time I may be ready to go home as usual."

He concluded by giving Patsy directions for Chick and Ida, and they separated.

Nick, after making a complete change in his appearance, went by a very roundabout way to the flat he had engaged.

He feared that his unknown enemy would shadow him, and, while the great detective had no alarm for his safety, he did dread to have his movements discovered.

That was because his heart was set not only on capturing the society thief, but on learning through him who the chief of the criminals was.

Nick's plan for the evening was one of the shrewdest he had ever made.

The circumstances of the Wendell robbery, which has been referred to, made him suspect that the work was done from inside, that is, by one of the guests.

As a theft of jewels meant that somebody had to receive the stolen property, he suspected that the "fence" must be the same as that used by the gang with whom he had already had a couple of skirmishes.

So, with the wide operations of the gang in mind, he had obtained a list of the guests who were present at the Wendell reception.

Looking over this list, it was an easy matter to strike out nearly all the names as those of persons who could not be suspected.

Most of those that were left were also struck out, after a little quiet investigation. They were the names of men who, though apparently rich, were really in debt right and left.

Some of these names were well known, not only in the fashionable world, but outside of it.

Nevertheless, Nick looked up their affairs and movements with the greatest care, for this was a game in which he was ready to suspect anybody.

It came down at last to the names of three men.

Chick had looked up their records, and reported all three as "doubtful." That is, every one of them had led a life that made it reasonable to suspect him of crime when the possible returns from the crime were very large.

It will not be necessary to say anything about two of these three, because two were not among the guests at the Belden reception.

For that reason, Nick decided that they had had no hand in the Wendell robbery.

The third had been a guest at both houses.

He was Melville Gaylord, a man who had never done a stroke of work in his life.

Gaylord had inherited a large fortune when he was about twenty-one, and had run a swift course with it.

At thirty he was so far broke that he could not keep the pace, and he had disappeared from New York, leaving many debts behind him.

He had been back in New York a few months, settled matters with his creditors, and had furnished an apartment in one of the great buildings on Fifty-ninth street, facing the park.

He had been welcomed by all his old friends, of whom there were many.

This was the man upon whom Nick's suspicions centered, and the detective believed him to be in league with the unknown head of the gang of criminals, whose crimes had set him to work without a client; for on this affair the great detective was putting all his own time, and that of his assistants, simply because he had found a case that interested him.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

WIPING OUT A SHADOW.

As soon as Nick had taken possession of the flat, he went to a furniture dealer's not far away, and had some articles sent over, for he was not sure that he would not have to occupy the place for several days.

The goods were bought on the installment plan by "Mr. Brown," who told the janitor that he was going to occupy the flat with his brother.

Nick knew a good deal about the neighborhood, as a case had taken him into this very building.

He remembered chasing a criminal over the roofs, and as soon as his furniture was put in he went up to the roof to see if there had been any changes since his last visit.

All was as it had been, and he breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

"Now, if all works well," he said to himself, "and the fellow takes the bait, we shall have him where we can talk business."

Late in the day, Chick, Mr. Brown's "brother," came with a couple of traveling bags, in which were contained changes of clothing that they would need for their work.

"Ida is at the Waldorf-Astoria," said Chick, "and will be ready at ten o'clock."

Nick nodded, and they went to dinner at a restaurant.

A little before ten o'clock they were putting on the finishing touches to their disguises in the flat.

Nick appeared to be an elderly man, Chick somewhat younger. Both would have been taken for foreigners and men of great wealth.

Each wore a high hat and full evening suits.

For once they took none of the articles of their business that they usually carried with them, except a revolver apiece.

Pocket lanterns, handcuffs, false beards, make-up paints, all such things were left behind.

"Don't you think," said Chick, as they were ready to start, "that we'd better have at least a pick-lock, in case——"

"No," said Nick. "If it won't work the way I have planned, it won't work at all. Besides, I have a fancy for doing this thing single-handed, so to speak. We'll play robbers to-night, Chick, and teach this fellow some lessons in his own business."

So saying, he held the door of the flat open for Chick to pass out.

When it was locked, Chick was already half-way up the stairs to the roof.

Nick had decided that it would not do at all to be seen going down the stairs, or from the house.

All this time he was in dread lest, in spite of his caution, somebody might have tracked him to the flat.

On the roof, they turned toward Lexington avenue.

The building they were in was the last in the row.

Between it and the next was a space about four feet wide.

The night was densely dark, and a storm seemed to be rising.

Knowing their way, they stepped safely across this space, and went on over the roofs until they came to an empty building that faced on the avenue.

They went down through this to the ground without meeting anybody.

Then they walked to the Savoy Hotel, where a carriage was waiting for Nick, that Chick had ordered in the name of Carlo Spontini.

"Good-evening, signor," said Chick, as Nick got in.

"I vill play you dat billiards ven I comes back from mine friend, Mrs. Van Pelt," responded Nick.

"Very well, signor; I'll wait for you."

Chick started into the hotel as the carriage rolled slowly away.

He saw a man pass the entrance, and set out down Fifth avenue on the run.

"Hello! hello!" thought Chick, "what's this? Has Nick been shadowed in spite of all his care, or have I been shadowed, and has the fellow got us mixed up?"

It might be either way, or it might be that the man was wholly innocent.

"A hundred to one he's straight," said Chick to himself, "but I can't take chances."

He watched the man and saw him drop to a walk when he came to Fifty-eighth street.

At the same moment Nick's carriage halted to let some other carriages make the turn ahead.

That fact interested Chick a good deal, and he

walked away from the hotel in the same direction that Nick's carriage and the man had taken.

Before he got to Fifty-eighth street the carriage was free of the blockade and started on.

Almost immediately the man ahead hastened his steps, and before he had gone another block he was running again.

"Seems to be keeping along even with Nick, doesn't he?" mused Chick.

He beckoned to the driver of a hansom.

The cab was promptly driven up to the curb.

"Here's a dollar," said Chick, handing up the money. "Set me down at the southeast corner of Fifty-sixth street."

"All right, sir," responded the cabman; "it's hurry up, I s'pose."

"Well, you needn't break your horse's neck, but push him a bit."

Chick was already in the cab.

"Oh, corks!" chuckled the driver, "dat's the easiest plunker dat ever come my way!"

He whipped up and the cab passed Nick's carriage between Fifty-seventh and Fifty-sixth streets.

It passed the running man, too, at the same time.

He was on the east sidewalk, and was jogging steadily along, as if he had a long distance to run and didn't want to get winded too early.

Chick watched him in passing, and also turned to look at him through the cab window.

He saw the man look over his shoulder toward Nick's carriage.

"That settles it!" said the detective to himself. "He's a shadow, and I shall have to make it my business to wipe him out."

The next minute the cab stopped at the corner of Fifty-sixth street, and Chick jumped out.

Nick's carriage was then about three rods away, and the running man the same distance.

As it happened, there was nobody else at that moment on the east sidewalk within a block.

Chick strolled slowly toward the running man.

As they met, the detective caught him by the arm,

whirled him half-around, and began to run beside him toward Madison avenue.

"What the——"

The man began to stammer and struggle.

Chick's grip was like steel.

"Shut up!" he whispered, sternly.

"But," the man began again, trying vainly to loosen Chick's hold.

"I told you to shut up!"

For a second or two the man was silent, while Chick compelled him to keep running.

"See here," he began again, "I don't propose——"

"See here, yourself!" interrupted Chick, and he ran the man into the dark doorway of a house.

He roughly pushed the shadow against the wall, held him there with one hand, and with the other drew his revolver.

Without a word at first, he pressed the cold muzzle against the man's forehead.

The shadow fell to trembling, and his breath came in gasps.

"You spoke of seeing here," said Chick, in a low, but stern, tone; "well, you see, don't you? or you feel. Don't you make any mistake about it, but come along with me quietly. I don't want to be seen with a prisoner just now, and so I shan't handcuff you. I'll shoot first. Understand?"

"I won't say a word!" replied the shadow, hoarsely.

"See that you don't till I get you where we can both talk freely."

Chick looked up the street toward Fifth avenue.

There was a hansom standing at the corner, and he suspected that it was the one he had just used.

That was the case. The driver was curious about the passenger who had paid a dollar for a ride of three blocks, and he had watched the capture of the shadow with the greatest astonishment.

He was still looking and wondering, when Chick called:

"Hi! cabby!"

Immediately the cab was driven down the street to where Chick and his prisoner stood.

"Want to work out the rest of that dollar?" asked Chick.

"Well," replied the cabman, disappointed, "a fare's a fare, you know——"

The detective laughed.

"All right, cabby," he said; "here's another fare," and he handed up a bill.

"Yes, sir; where to?"

Chick and his prisoner got into the cab, and the detective gave his order through the trap:

"Grand Central Police Station."

"Yes, sir."

"Say, cabby!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Go down by Madison avenue. No more Fifth avenue on this trip; see?"

"All right, sir."

Chick's reason for this was that if they went down Fifth avenue the shadow might recognize Nick's carriage. Then, if by any accident the fellow should escape, he might have information that would be troublesome when used against Nick.

So the cab took them to the Grand Central police station by the Madison avenue route, and when they arrived Chick had one of the patrolmen on duty there to go to the messenger office in the station for a telegram blank and an envelope.

The patrolman brought several blanks and envelopes and took them into the captain's room, where Chick had gone with his prisoner.

Up to that time the detective had not said a word to the man.

Now, with the telegraph blanks in his hand, he said:

"Your name? Speak up!"

"John Doe," said the shadow.

"Very well; Doe will do as well as any other name. You live in the East River, don't you?"

No answer.

"Take that pen and write on this blank what I tell you."

John Doe took the pen, dipped it, and waited.
"We will begin with the address," said Chick.
'Write, 'Mr. Melville Gaylord.'"

At the mention of this name John Doe's face paled suddenly, and his hand trembled.

Up to this moment Chick had been bluffing. He had thought out his plan while in the cab.

"If he doesn't show any sign when I mention Gaylord's name," he had thought, "I shall feel that I have made a mistake."

Chick knew now that he had sized the shadow up correctly.

"Write, I tell you!" he commanded.

The man obeyed, but his hand trembled so that the name could hardly be read.

"That won't do," said Chick. "Tear up that paper and try again. I'll tell you something, Doe," he added, more gently; "do this thing straight, and it won't be half so troublesome for you."

"I'll do what you say," the man responded, taking another sheet of paper.

Chick then dictated the following, which the man wrote steadily enough to pass:

MR. MELVILLE GAYLORD.

DEAR SIR:—Nick Carter has just bought a ticket for Boston and taken a berth in the eleven o'clock train. I saw him go into the sleeping car and give up his tickets to the porter.

The man was evidently frightened, but he looked desperate when he laid down the pen.

"That isn't all," said Chick, slowly. "Write Mr. Gaylord's address on an envelope."

John Doe hesitated a moment and then wrote: "Mr. Melville Gaylord, 617 Fifth avenue."

Chick took the envelope and tore it into pieces.

"Fool!" he said. "Do you suppose I don't know? This time you'll write his correct address, and then you'll sign the message with any name that he will recognize. And, understand me, I shall know whether he will recognize it or not."

The man drew a deep breath.

"All right!" he muttered, "I've done my best."

Then he addressed an envelope correctly, and

signed the initials "J. D. N." at the bottom of the message.

The quick way in which he wrote the initials proved to Chick that they were ones that would arouse no suspicions in Gaylord's mind.

He put the message in the envelope and sealed it.

"Oh! there's one thing more," said Chick, as if he had forgotten something; "did Gaylord expect you to send word to him, or call with it?"

John Doe's lips were pressed together for an instant, and his eyes wavered.

"He expected me to bring him word," he answered.

"You lie!" remarked Chick, quietly. "He told you it would be better not to show yourself at his house late at night."

The shadow struck his fist violently on the desk.

"You're on to everything!" he muttered.

Chick smiled, but said nothing. He had done some first rate guessing and bluffing, and all the tricks were his.

John Doe was locked up, and, it may as well be said here that, as he proved to be a man for whom the police had a warrant, that Nick, after the night's work was done, left him to be held on that warrant, as there was enough in that to keep him in jail for a long time.

Chick took the message around to the messenger office, and had it sent to Gaylord's address.

Then he went back to the Savoy to wait for Nick.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

IDA AT THE RECEPTION.

Meantime, Nick's driver took him to the Waldorf-Astoria.

Ida was waiting for him in the ladies' parlor, and Nick escorted her at once to the carriage.

"I don't know about this, Ida," said Nick, when they were rolling up Fifth avenue.

"About what?" she asked, anxiously.

"Your make-up and costume."

"Why! what's the matter with it?"

"I think it's likely to set every unmarried swell in the city begging for an introduction."

"Oh, pshaw!"

She spoke as if she had no use for unmarried swells, which was true enough, but she liked the compliment, and Nick knew it.

Indeed, she had never looked better.

Ida Jones was a young woman of rare beauty, but it generally happened that her work as a detective was of a kind to make her conceal it.

On this occasion, she had "got herself up regardless," as the saying is, and the result was stunning.

Her naturally fair complexion had been changed by a delicate wash to one of brown.

A string of pearls was around her throat, and there were diamonds in her hair that were likely to outshine any she would meet during the evening.

Her costume was one of richest elegance, and, altogether, Nick was confident that nobody would suspect her of being an everyday New Yorker—"which she isn't," thought the detective, proudly, "for there are none in her class."

They had no talk about the case in hand, for Ida understood perfectly what she was to do.

It was to be a case of quiet watching, Nick's two desires being to make sure that Gaylord was at work, and then to get away from the house as quickly and as quietly as possible.

It was not yet half-past ten when the carriage drew up near Mrs. Van Pelt's residence.

There was a long line of carriages before the door.

Nick had counted on that, and his own had to take its place in line. So several minutes passed before he and Ida could get out.

When they did so, Nick told his driver to wait just around the next corner.

"I may leave early," he said, "and if so will walk to the carriage instead of having it called to the door."

The detectives then crossed the walk under the awning that had been raised, and mounted the steps.

Servants opened the door without question, and directed them to dressing-rooms on the flight above.

When they had laid aside their outer garments they met at the stairs and descended together.

"Signor Carlo Spontini!" called the butler, and the next moment the detectives were bowing to Mrs. Van Pelt.

"So kind of you to come," she said, extending her hand.

Preston was near, according to agreement, and Mrs. Van Pelt turned to him.

"Mr. Preston," she said, "I want you to meet Signor Spon—"

"Why!" interrupted Preston, "Spontini and I have met. How do you do, signor? and your daughter! Glad to see you both. How long have you been in New York?"

He immediately led the detectives to another part of the room, as if he wanted to talk over past events.

Mr. Black joined them and was introduced to the "Italian banker" and his daughter, as if they had not met before.

The four then fell to talking, and the first part, and, as Nick believed, the hardest part of the affair was safely over.

He had wondered some whether Mrs. Van Pelt would be equal to carrying off her small part in the scheme.

The scene was very much like that at the Beldens on the night before, but there was not such an uncomfortable crowd.

One thing happened exactly as Nick had foreseen.

Ida's beauty did attract the attention of young men, two or three of whom asked Mrs. Van Pelt about her.

"Ask George Black to introduce you," she told them, with a laugh.

It was the best thing she could have said, for Black made it his business to talk all the time to Ida, and others felt shy of approaching.

After the first moments nobody paid attention to them, except as glances of admiration and curiosity were directed at Ida.

They had not been long in the house before they heard a name announced that interested them:

"Mr. Melville Gaylord!"

Neither Black nor Preston noticed that the detectives gave this gentleman a sharp looking over as he came in, but from that instant the man's every motion was watched by both of them.

He seemed to know pretty nearly everybody there, and it looked as if he was popular.

At last he joined the throng that pressed into the dining-room, and took part in the struggle at the table. He soon came out with a dish in each hand.

He went the whole length of the drawing-room with them, and handed them to two ladies who were talking together there.

Then back he went to the table, and again struggled out with a couple of plates, which he passed to ladies in another part of the room.

"He's letting himself be seen by as many as possible," thought Nick.

It certainly seemed so, and, after a quarter of an hour, the detective began to wonder if he might have been mistaken, or if Gaylord had decided not to operate in this house.

Meantime Mr. Black had been trying all this time to get a plate of ice cream and cake for Ida.

When he finally succeeded, he said:

"If the rest of us only had the skill of Mel Gaylord we could help all the ladies in half-an-hour."

It was impossible for Nick to keep Gaylord in view every minute without following him about in the crowd, and that the detective would not do.

But when two or three minutes had passed without seeing him at all, he quietly made a tour of the rooms as if he were looking for a friend in the crowd.

When he returned, he said:

"Felicia, shall I take ze plate to ze table?"

"Thank you, papa," she answered, giving him the plate.

Nick at once joined the crowd around the table.

"Walk with me as far as the hall door," whispered Ida to Black.

He gave her his arm, and slowly they made their way through the throng.

They went into the hall, where Ida left him and ascended the stairs, while Black returned to the dining-room by another door.

A moment later Nick quietly disappeared.

He went to the gentlemen's dressing-room and put on his overcoat, took his hat, and stepped into the upper hall to wait for Ida.

She meantime had put on her cloak and made ready to leave the house.

In this she was assisted by a single servant, who had been left in the room to help late comers.

Fortunately for Ida's plan a late comer entered just as she was ready to go, and while the servant was busy with the new arrival, Ida slipped into an adjoining room.

If the servant noticed that she had gone, she doubtless supposed that she had gone into the hall.

The room Ida entered was used ordinarily as a dressing-room by Mrs. Van Pelt, and next beyond it was her bedroom.

To-night neither the dressing-room nor the bedroom were supposed to be in use.

Ida went softly to the bedroom door, and, with the utmost caution, turned the handle.

She found, as she expected, that the door was locked.

Then she listened, and, after a moment, was quite certain that she heard somebody moving inside.

Steps seemed to be approaching the door.

If she had disturbed the robber at his work, she had spoiled Nick's scheme, for he wanted the thief to get all he could.

Perhaps he was coming to the door to see if anybody were there, listening and watching.

Ida looked quickly around.

It would not do to go back to the room she had just left, but there was another door——

She went to it, supposing that it opened on a closet, and was glad to find that it was not locked.

When open, however, it proved to be upon a

branch of the hall leading toward the back of the house.

This suited Ida as well as a closet, especially as she saw at a glance that the thief could have got into the bedroom without being observed.

A flight of stairs was before her.

He could have come up that way, gone through the open dressing-room and so, if he had a key, as undoubtedly he had, could have unlocked the bedroom door and locked it behind him.

If he had come up the front stairs he would have been seen by servants in a part of the house where gentlemen were not supposed to be on that evening.

It was that fact, that men were not supposed to be in that part of the house, that had made it necessary for Nick to have Ida's assistance.

She stood there a full minute, and then returned to the dressing-room.

The bedroom door was still closed, but her handkerchief, that she had purposely dropped on the floor close beside it, was now two feet away from it.

That showed that the door had been opened.

It was as much information as Nick wanted her to gain, and now not a minute must be lost in leaving the house.

She picked up her handkerchief, and again opened the door into the hall.

A man was approaching softly, and he halted suddenly at sight of her.

Ida had never seen him, but she did not need an introduction to know that this was Foster, the private detective engaged by Mrs. Van Pelt.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

DETECTIVE FOSTER IN DIFFICULTIES.

The young woman's heart sank heavily, but she did not show the slightest trace of surprise or fear.

With an appearance of the greatest unconcern, she started to pass Foster, going toward the main stairway, where she knew she would find Nick waiting for her.

"I beg your pardon," said he, stepping squarely in front of her.

His eyes gleamed with satisfaction and triumph.

"Sir!" she responded, haughtily.

"I must ask you to wait a moment."

Ida gave him a crushing look and started on.

Again he got in her way.

"I am very sorry," he began, "but, under the circumstances——"

He said nothing more just then, for hands were laid upon his arms with an iron grip, and he was lifted clean off his feet and set carefully down upon the other side of the hall.

"Does zis fellow dare to speak to you, daughter?" demanded Signor Spontini, in low, stern tones.

Nick had seen Foster making for the rear hall, and had followed softly, fearing just this sort of difficulty.

"He stopped me, papa," returned Ida, taking Nick's arm.

Together they started instantly for the main stairway.

Foster darted quickly ahead of them, getting in their way just at the point where the branch connected with the main hall.

"I can talk with a man," he said rapidly, but in low tones, "and I advise you to listen. I am an officer."

Here he pulled aside the lapel of his dress coat, and displayed a detective's badge.

"I do not know either of you. I never saw you before in this house, and I am familiar with the faces of Mrs. Van Pelt's friends. If you are——"

Nick interrupted stiffly.

"I no understand zis outrage," he said, producing a card and handing it to Foster. "If you have ze right to know me, read and let us pass."

Foster glanced at the card.

"I was about to say," he went on, coolly, "that if you are all right, and this lady can explain her presence in the room from which she has just come, nobody will apologize more humbly than I will, but,

under the circumstances, I must be satisfied. And there must be no scene, no disturbance——”

“Zen why,” interposed Nick, “do you make ze scene here?” and he turned his head slightly in the direction of the stairs, where a number of persons were coming up.

Foster looked around. After that disgraceful affair at the Beldens the evening before, he was most anxious to win out here without letting the guests know that anything was going on.

He had believed that if a robbery was attempted it would be during the refreshment hour, and he had quietly gone upstairs to have a look at the bedroom where the jewels were kept.

Seeing a stranger coming from there, he was certain that he had the thief in his grasp, and he did not doubt that Ida had many gems concealed in her clothing.

“Very well,” said Foster, “step this way.”

He went along the hall to a room near the head of the stairs. It was a bedchamber. He opened the door and stood aside for Ida to enter.

Obeying a nudge from Nick, she did so, and then Nick paused, as if politely indicating that he would enter last.

Foster preferred to go last, but so many people were near whose attention might be attracted that he hastily followed Ida.

Then Nick went in, and, as he closed the door behind him, he softly took the key from the lock.

He held the key concealed in his palm.

Foster turned and faced him.

What he was going to say will have to be guessed, for Nick saw his opportunity and acted on it like lightning.

He heard the sound of voices in the hall, passing away from the head of the stairs.

Another moment and other persons might be there whose curiosity, if not suspicion, would be aroused by the exit of Ida and himself.

So Nick gave one leap toward Foster, caught him around the body so as to pin both his arms to

his sides, using his left arm for this, while he put up his right hand and held it immovably over Foster's mouth.

At the same time he caught Foster's knees between his own, and the private detective could not stir a muscle.

“Felicia,” said Nick, then, “go, my child, and get into ze carriage.”

Ida quickly opened the door, went out and closed it behind her, but, perceiving what Nick wanted, she did not let the door come wholly to.

It could, therefore, be opened without the loss of a fraction of a second.

The instant she was well out of the room, Nick raised Foster from the floor, and hurled him upon the bed.

The man fell full length, with no sound that could be heard beyond the room.

With two strides Nick was at the door.

Foster was still sprawling on the bed when he swiftly opened and closed it.

No persons were near.

Nick inserted the key in the lock, turned it, left it there, and calmly walked downstairs.

He overtook Ida at the foot, and they went out together.

“Call your carriage, sir?” asked the man whose duty it was to do that.

Nick shook his head.

They walked up to the corner and found their carriage waiting, according to orders.

“Drive around the block,” said Nick to the driver, as he got in.

Ida was all of a tremble.

“Why! what's the matter?” he asked.

“Oh!” she shuddered, “I have ruined your game!”

“What!”

“There will be a scene, Foster will raise a racket——”

Nick leaned back against the cushions and laughed until the tears ran.

“I declare!” he cried, “I believe you are fright-

ened! You've faced the most desperate and blood-thirsty criminals without a tremor and yet you go into a fit over meeting a detective."

"I never was so scared in my life," she said, seriously.

"Well, there's no reason for it. Things couldn't have gone better."

"Nick! you don't mean it!"

"I do."

"You're saying so only to make me feel easier for having got you into such a situation and spoiled all your plans."

"See here, Ida," he exclaimed, "you don't understand the situation at all. Even if my plans were spoiled, it wouldn't be your fault, for you couldn't help running up against Foster, but the fact is that it was mighty lucky that you did so. He was on his way to the boudoir. The thief was at work there, wasn't he?"

"Yes—that is, somebody was in there."

"Very well. Foster would have surprised him. Now, I don't want this thief to be caught in the act. Suppose Foster does make a racket. It will be a little one, for he doesn't want a disturbance, but that's his lookout. The point is that he will suspect us of the robbery. Your interruption of Foster's movements has given the thief time to finish his work."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Of course you hadn't. Very well, what next? An examination of the bedroom will be made. It's now going on, I suppose, for, of course, Foster won't stay locked in that bedroom very long. It will be found that there has been a robbery. The criminal will not dare leave the house for a while, which is exactly what I want, and, meantime, Foster will chase himself around town after you and me, particularly you, my beauty!"

"Well," said Ida, with a long breath, "that way of looking at it makes me feel better. What are you going to do now?"

Nick had rapped on the front window of the carriage to make the driver stop.

The carriage had gone so nearly around a block that the line of other carriages waiting to move up to Mrs. Van Pelt's door, was just in front of them.

"I am going," said Nick, getting out, "to let the driver take you quietly home, where you can answer Foster in any way you please, if he succeeds in tracing you there. I don't believe he will."

"For myself, I shall stroll by the house to see if anything is going on. Then I shall join Chick and run the game out."

He said "good-night," gave instructions to the driver, and walked quietly on to Fifth avenue.

Having crossed the avenue, so as to be on the side opposite Mrs. Van Pelt's, he strolled slowly by.

Two or three guests were taking their departure, and a late comer was just going in.

He saw nothing to indicate that trouble had been discovered.

"Just for the fun of it," thought Nick, "I should like to know what Foster is doing, poor fellow!"

As he learned at a later time just what Foster did, the facts may be stated here.

Foster, as Nick surmised, did not stay long in the bedroom.

He scrambled from the bed as fast as he could and ran to the door.

Finding it locked, his first thought was to pound on it and call to somebody to turn the key, but that would be making a disturbance, which was against Mrs. Van Pelt's wishes, and, besides, it would put the private detective in a very ridiculous position.

He didn't care to be laughed at for the rest of his life for permitting a pair of thieves to lock him in a bedroom.

So he ran around to the small dressing-room opening from the chamber, and through that into another room, where he found a door that opened upon the hall.

This, luckily, as he thought, was unlocked.

He went straight to the bedroom, which he unlocked with a key that Mrs. Van Pelt had given him early in the evening, for he had told her that he should keep an eye on that room.

What he saw there at a glance led him to hurry downstairs and ask the doormen about the departure of Carlo Spontini and his handsome daughter.

By that time Nick and Ida were half-way around the block.

The doormen told Foster what little they knew, and he summoned a policeman, who had been assigned to stay in the neighborhood during the reception.

Foster told the policeman to trace the Italian's carriage.

Drivers who were waiting had seen the carriage go away, and they knew the name of its driver and where he belonged.

So the policeman reported the matter at his station, and orders were given to hunt up the driver at his stable and make him give the police information as to where Spontini was stopping.

Meantime Foster went back into the house and spoke quietly to Mrs. Van Pelt.

She excused herself to her guests, and went up to the bedroom with him.

Foster pointed to the jewel cabinet.

The door and drawers had been forced open and all the contents, except the empty cases, had disappeared.

Although prepared for just this discovery, Mrs. Van Pelt was so overcome that she sank into a chair.

"Dreadful!" she gasped.

"And I regret to say," said Foster, "that the worst of it is that the thief has escaped. But I think," he added hastily, "that we shall catch her before morning."

"Her?" echoed Mrs. Van Pelt, "her! what do you mean?"

The detective was about to answer, when he perceived that they were not alone.

Mr. Melville Gaylord was standing at the door.

He had just raised his hand to knock so as to attract their attention.

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Van Pelt," he said, "but, knowing this man to be a detective, and seeing you go out with him, I fancied something bad had happened—My soul! you've been robbed!"

He said the latter as his eyes fell upon the open cabinet.

"Yes, Mr. Gaylord," she answered, sorrowfully; "the detective was just going to tell me what he knows about it. I hope none of the others noticed anything."

"I think not; in fact, I am quite sure of it."

"Then, please do not say anything. It will not bring the jewels back to disturb the party."

"I will be as silent as the grave, Mrs. Van Pelt."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Foster."

She turned to the detective, but Foster hesitated.

"Begging your pardon, madam," he said, "and Mr. Gaylord's pardon also, there are circumstances here that I'd much rather speak to you about alone."

"Oh!" cried Gaylord, "don't apologize to me. It's all right, my man! I'm the one who should apologize, but I couldn't help being interested, don't you know. If there's anything I can do, any errand, notify the police——"

"The police have been notified," interrupted Foster.

"Indeed! you lose no time. That's right. Well, Mrs. Van Pelt, permit me to withdraw. If your absence is noticed, I will make some reasonable explanation that will disarm suspicion of what has happened."

"Do!" she said.

He bowed his way out, and Foster, appearing to be much embarrassed, said:

"The fact is, Mrs. Van Pelt, I had my hands on the thief, or thieves, for there were two of them. I almost caught her in the act, but I was so anxious not to create a scene that I—I lost them."

"Lost them!"

"Yes, that is—the fact is—I took them into a chamber, intending to send for you and have the woman searched, when the man suddenly knocked

me down, and they both ran out before I could get up!"

"Goodness! what a desperate pair. Do you know who they are?"

"The man gave me this card."

He handed Nick's card to her.

"Carlo Spontini!" she gasped, and her eyes burned with amazement. "Oh! impossible!"

"It is natural that you should think so," said Foster. "You would say the same about any of your guests against whom I might bring a charge. But, tell me, Mrs. Van Pelt, do you really know who this Italian is? I never heard of him before this evening."

"Yes, I know who he is—" began Mrs. Van Pelt, confidently, and then she stopped suddenly and her face paled.

A terrible thought had come to her.

Did she really know who Carlo Spontini was?

Had she been duped by a clever scoundrel, who had pretended to be the famous Nicholas Carter?

It was a dreadful possibility! She had never seen Nicholas Carter—that is, not until this morning. Ah! how could she have been so careless?

"I see that you have reason to suspect him," remarked Foster, quietly.

"I don't know," she faltered, "let me think a moment."

She thought of Nick's promises—that there should be no disturbance, that he would restore the stolen property; she thought of her own agreement to say nothing of it to her own detective.

But here were her empty jewel cases. A robbery certainly had been committed, and that strange man and his beautiful daughter were now out of the house.

The end of her thought was that she told Foster all about it.

His face flushed at first, and then he listened with intense interest.

"Well," he said, "if it was Nick Carter, I shall no longer be ashamed of myself. And I have my own reasons for thinking that he really was the Italian."

Foster was thinking of the gigantic strength displayed by the man, who had lifted him and thrown him as if he were a child.

"Then what shall we do?" asked Mrs. Van Pelt.

"Nothing," he answered, promptly. "If the thief was a real Italian, or his daughter, the police and myself will track them. If it was Nick Carter we musn't do anything to interfere with his plans, whatever they are. I am not jealous of Nick Carter, Mrs. Van Pelt. If it was any other detective, perhaps I might be, but Carter is the king of us all, madam, and he has his own way of doing things. If it was he, he will tell me all about it when the right time comes, and will do everything he can to make up for turning me down as he did. Meantime, we shall gain nothing by saying anything about it, and if we said anything it might happen to block Carter, and that must not happen."

"I think you take a very generous view of it," she said.

Foster bowed.

"I take off my hat to Nick Carter every time," he remarked.

They started to leave the room, when she hesitated.

"There's Mr. Gaylord," she said, remembering that he knew what had happened. "He will ask questions—"

"Tell him," interrupted Foster, "that I think the thief was Spontini's daughter. That will do no harm, and I'm not yet sure that it isn't the truth."

Mrs. Van Pelt gave this message to Gaylord when, ten minutes later, he whispered a question to her.

"I suppose it may be so," he answered, thoughtfully. "I never saw Spontini, and know nothing about him. I wish there was something I could do to help."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Van Pelt, "but Mr. Foster thinks the best thing is to say nothing. He and the police will do all that is necessary."

Gaylord bowed respectfully, and a little later bade her good-night and left the house.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

ROBBING A THIEF.

Nick walked rapidly to the Savoy Hotel.

Chick was waiting for him, and at the moment of his arrival he happened to be in the entrance.

They crossed the plaza at once, and went up Fifty-ninth street to the building where Gaylord had his apartment.

"The Van Pelt job has been done, unless I am greatly mistaken," said Nick, and that was all the account of the matter he gave at the time, as they had but a short distance to go.

The building is one of the largest in the city. On the ground floor there is a superintendent's office off the main entrance.

Elevators are used by the tenants and their visitors, and a number of hall boys are employed as general servants, in addition to the men who run the elevators.

The detectives, with their overcoats open, thus showing the diamonds on their shirt fronts, and with their hands thrust carelessly into their pockets, entered and went up to the superintendent.

"We've just left Mr. Gaylord at Mrs. Van Pelt's," said Nick, easily. "He will be along in a few minutes, and he told us to go up to his rooms and wait for him."

"All right," responded the superintendent, and he called to a hall boy.

"Gaylord gave me his key," added Nick.

"It won't be necessary," said the superintendent; "John, show these gentlemen to Mr. Gaylord's."

They followed the boy to the elevator, and went up several flights.

The boy not only unlocked the flat door for them, but turned on the electric lights.

Nick tipped him a quarter, and the boy left them.

"Now, then," said Nick, "we mustn't lose a minute. We must find where he keeps his plunder."

"What if he takes it to a bank?" suggested Chick.

"I don't believe he's such a fool," replied Nick. "He must get rid of it from time to time, but I don't

think he carries it to the fence the day after he gets it. I've reckoned all along that he hides it somewhere in the flat until he has a chance to take it to the fence."

They were standing in Gaylord's sitting-room. It was a splendidly furnished place. The chairs were of the most expensive kind, there were costly paintings on the walls, the floor was covered with elegant rugs, and on the mantels were vases and gold and silver ornaments.

"He's something of an athlete," remarked Chick, pointing to the fireplace.

That was the one part of the room where the articles in sight were not expensive. Over the mantel hung a pair of boxing gloves, a set of foils, a fencing mask, and other things of that sort, and on the floor beside the grate was a pair of Indian clubs.

Nick nodded and went to a cabinet in a corner.

It had glass doors, and on its shelves were various medals for success in athletic contests.

The detective tried the cabinet door. It opened readily, and he sounded the interior for secret drawers.

Meantime Chick was searching behind the picture frames, and in other places.

"Hardly likely to be in this room, anyway," said Nick. "Let's try his bathroom and bedroom."

It took but a minute to satisfy them that nothing was hidden in the first-named room. In the bedroom it was another matter.

A good many articles of furniture were there, and it took some time to investigate them all.

Not a drawer was locked. Everything they touched opened readily, but nothing was discovered that was not perfectly innocent.

"This is beginning to look skittish," said Chick.

"The stuff is here somewhere," returned Nick, doggedly. "I can't believe that I've sized up that fellow and his methods and made any mistake."

"If you have," suggested Chick, "we'd better get through and out of this before he comes back."

"We haven't half looked!" exclaimed Nick, impatiently.

He went to the open window and looked out.

"A fire escape," he muttered. "That is as I thought. Have you explored the bed, Chick?"

"Thoroughly."

"Then come back to the sitting-room. Wait! There must be a dining-room to an apartment like this."

They found a dining-room, with a large butler's pantry and a china closet.

Everything was easily searched, for here also nothing was locked up.

"I believe we're on a false trail for once," said Chick.

"Guess again!" retorted Nick. "The fellow is simply too clever for us up to the present. You're not going to admit that we're beaten, are you?"

"Well, I should hate to be found prowling around an innocent man's rooms."

"Come back to the sitting-room."

Nick spoke sharply. He was nettled and impatient. Time was passing, and if Gaylord's booty was not soon found the game would be lost.

He sat down in an easy-chair, and stared around the room.

Chick went to turning over the rugs and poking under the table in search of secret drawers.

Presently Nick strolled over to the fireplace.

"Loose brick?" asked Chick, with a laugh.

"No," and Nick picked up the Indian clubs.

He balanced them in his hands a moment, as if testing their weight, which, in fact, was what he was doing.

"Come here!" he said.

Chick crossed the room.

Nick had set down one of the clubs, and was holding the large end of the other toward him.

"Take hold of it," he said.

Chick held the large end with both hands, and Nick began to turn the small end.

It proved that the small end was screwed into the large.

In a moment the club was in two pieces, and from the larger one, which Chick held, a diamond ring dropped to the floor.

"Ah!" exclaimed Chick.

Nick said nothing, but, taking out his handkerchief, spread it on the floor.

Chick turned his half of the club upside down, and there rolled out thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of jewels.

"Better than I thought," muttered Nick. "Here are some of the things stolen from the Wendells, and all the plunder he got last night from the Beldens. Put the club together again, Chick, and stand it up in the fireplace just as we found it."

Chick did so, while Nick carried the jewels in his handkerchief to the bedroom and placed them on a bureau.

There he knotted the corners of the handkerchief so as to make a bag of it.

"Nearly twelve," he remarked, looking at his watch. "Better turn off the lights, Chick."

His assistant obeyed, feeling an excitement that was not usual to him when chasing criminals; for Chick knew that the most difficult part of their game was yet to be played.

He returned to the bedroom, and they waited in the dark for several minutes.

Then a key turned in the lock of the outside door, and they heard steps in the sitting-room.

At the same time a line of light beneath the bedroom door showed that Gaylord had turned the electric button.

They heard him take off his overcoat and toss it on a chair.

Next he went to the dining-room, and they could hear the hiss of a siphon bottle, as he poured himself a long drink.

A little later he went back to the sitting-room, and there was a moment of silence.

Then he came to the bedroom.

It was dark there, and Nick's fingers were on the electric button.

Just as Gaylord got well inside, Nick flashed the lights.

Gaylord started violently, and found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver.

He had an Indian club in his hand.

"The gun's loaded, guvnor," said Nick, with a slangy drawl. "I'll shoot ye as I would a maddog if you squirm. You might as well drop the club. It's empty, and I've got the stuff that was in it."

With his left hand he held out the handkerchief full of jewels.

Gaylord, white as ashes, looked from one detect-

ive to the other. Then he lifted the club and shook it.

He shrugged his shoulders, and let it fall to the floor.

"I've seen you before," he said.

Nick nodded.

"Carlo Spontini, I believe. Well, it was well done. You're from headquarters, I suppose? or are you Pinkertons?"

"That doesn't matter," replied Nick; "we've got you, and you'll have to go with us."

"In that case," said Gaylord, "you might as well have all there is. The Van Pelt stuff is out there."

"Bring it in," Nick ordered.

Gaylord went to the sitting-room, Nick holding him covered at every step, and took from a table a large quantity of jewels.

"Hold your handkerchief, Billy," said Nick, and Chick obeyed, receiving the gems and tying them up as Nick had done the others.

"You've done well," repeated Gaylord, desperately. "I can't help admiring you. I suppose you'll let me pack a few articles of clothing in a bag?"

"Yes, but be quick," replied Nick. "I don't want to make any disturbance here, so I'll step out and call a cab. Give me the swag, Billy, and stand guard while I'm gone."

Chick drew his revolver, and gave Nick his handkerchief.

"I sha'n't be gone two minutes," said Nick, "and you must be ready when I return."

"All right," replied Gaylord, opening a closet and pulling out a traveling bag.

He then went to the bureau and began to take out clothing.

Chick, meantime, stood beside the bed, and Nick went out through the sitting-room.

Gaylord looked slyly up at Chick.

"I suppose you expect to get pretty well paid for this, eh?" said the thief.

"Mebbe," responded Chick.

"I guess you've been successful before. It isn't every headquarters detective who can wear diamonds and such expensive clothes."

"Paste diamonds," said Chick, "and clothes hired for the occasion."

"Oh!"

There was a strange ring in Gaylord's voice as he stopped packing his bag and stood up.

"What's the matter with retiring on a fortune?" he asked, with a keen look at Chick.

"Do you mean that you'll divide?" asked the detective.

"Yes. Three equal parts. Two for you men, one for me. What could be fairer?"

"Nothing, but it don't go."

"Then," exclaimed Gaylord, suddenly, "take nothing and die!"

With the words he leaped upon Chick, and gave him a violent push, so that the detective fell back full length on the bed.

At the same time Gaylord touched a spring with his foot and the bed shut up instantly.

Chick was caught in it, unable to move a muscle and doomed to smother to death unless quickly rescued.

In less than the two minutes he had spoken of Nick returned. He had not been further than the general hall of the building.

He found the lights as he had left them, but it was suspiciously still in the bedroom.

He hurried in there and took in the situation at a glance.

Down came the bed with a bang!

Chick sat up and gasped.

"Gee!" he said, "that was a close call."

"Where's that fellow gone?" demanded Nick, in an angry tone.

"How the devil do you suppose I know?" retorted Chick, with an equal show of anger.

Nick ran to the open window.

"Down the fire escape," he said.

"Well," suggested Chick, "ain't we better off as it is?"

"Yes," replied Nick, "that's so. I didn't know what to do with him, but I'd have felt safer to knock him on the head somewhere. However, he won't dare tell on us. Think of that, Billy! He won't dare complain to the police. Oh! this is a rich evening!"

"Right you are, but we don't want to hang round here any longer. Let's clear out."

"We can't be too quick about it."

They hurried through the sitting-room and shut off the lights before they opened the door into the hall.

No sooner had they closed the door behind them than Gaylord's bathroom door opened and a man

came out who made all haste to find an overcoat and slip to the outside door, where he listened until he heard the elevator stop at the floor, and start down again.

When Nick and Chick left the elevator they walked slowly through the main hall of the building to the street.

"Going to take a cab?" asked Chick in a tone loud enough for the superintendent and hall boys to hear.

"If it doesn't rain," replied Nick, equally loudly, "I'd rather walk, but we can get a cab if we want one at the Plaza."

It was not raining, but the sky was black with clouds. A thunderstorm was beginning, but the detectives did not want a cab. It was part of their game to walk.

They went down to Lexington avenue, turned north and walked up to the building through which they made their way to the roof.

As they came out upon the roof, Nick said softly:

"Go carefully. We don't want to step across the edge in the dark."

Dark was no name for it! They couldn't see their hands before their faces except when the lightning flashed.

That was frequently, and the thunderclaps followed the flashes almost instantly.

Indeed, they were in the center of the storm, and every crash of thunder shook the buildings beneath their feet.

They had come close to the open space between them, and the building in which Nick had taken a flat, and were going very cautiously, when there was a flash that lasted two or three seconds.

It lit up all the neighborhood, and they could see their way perfectly.

As they were about to step across the open space they heard a voice behind them, and Nick knew that his plan had worked and that they had convinced their quarry that they were only thieves.

"Stand where you are, you two! I've got a loaded revolver and it's my turn now."

The detectives recognized the voice of Gaylord.

They halted at once, and faced about, but they could not see the man, for the lightning had ceased.

There was a moment of perfect silence.

Then Nick struck a match, and held it up at arm's length.

By its light they could see Gaylord within six feet of them, pointing a revolver at them.

"Why don't you shoot, guvnor?" asked Nick, impudently. "Are you afraid of the noise? I should be if I was in your place. That kind of a gun is the very mischief for making a noise. Better chuck it and get one of the pattern we use."

"I shall shoot, just the same, and chance the noise," responded Gaylord, coolly, "if you don't restore me my property. Drop that match and don't light another. The lightning will give us all the illumination we need."

Nick let the match fall.

"Now," added Gaylor, "stand where you are a half-minute and I'll tell you something. I suppose you two fellows have heard about honor among thieves? I want you to understand, then, that I spotted you for what you are while you were still in my rooms. At first, I admit that I thought you were detectives, and I felt pretty bad, but my suspicions were aroused when one of you went out to call a cab. Later you gave yourselves away, and there's no use of your trying the detective dodge any further."

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"I mean that I didn't go down the fire escape as you thought. I was so sure that you were thieves that after I had shut up one of you in my folding bed I slipped into my bathroom, where I heard every word you said. I left the bathroom door open, and you were so crazy to get away with the swag that you didn't even look in there."

"Well," said Nick, "it's the old question: What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I'm going to get my share of that plunder."

"Your share?"

"Yes. I offered your partner a divvy, and he was fool enough to refuse. Now, you must admit that I've got the advantage of you both. I admire your cleverness and boldness, and I again offer to divide."

"I don't see your advantage."

"You don't? Do you think I won't shoot?"

"You can't hit more than one at a time, guvnor, and the other will drop you before you can fire again. That leaves the advantage with us."

"Perhaps, but the one who is left won't have a pleasant time of it explaining two dead bodies, and his possession of a fortune in stolen jewels."

"There's something in that."

At this moment there was another long flash and a furious clap of thunder.

By the light they saw Gaylord standing as before with his revolver leveled at them.

There was the look of calm desperation in his eye that showed that he meant business.

"And there's something more," said Gaylord, when darkness had again come on; "have you fellows thought how you are going to turn that stuff into cash?"

"Yes," replied Nick, eagerly, "we have thought of it, and we allow that most likely you have the advantage of us there. It's a rich haul, but we will have to make big sacrifices at any fence we know about."

"Exactly, and I know how to dispose of the stuff at nearly its full value."

In the darkness Nick gave Chick a nudge.

The plan was working around to the point he had hoped for.

"The fact is," added Gaylord, "that if we divide even and you leave the fence to me, I can get so much out of the stuff that your share will be greater than if you handle it in your own way."

"How can we be certain of that?"

"Well," answered Gaylord, slowly, "I'll tell you. I've never stacked up against such a pair as you. I think you ought to be in the deal for good."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that there is a crowd organized for doing this sort of business. I'm only one of it. I do the high society end. That's a big field, and there's plenty of room in it for clever men like you. I'll let you in if you do the square thing now."

"What do you think, Billy?" asked Nick.

"Sounds well," replied Chick, "but is his nobs the boss of the gang? Can he do what he says?"

"I'm not the head of the crowd," said Gaylord, who had heard the question and answer, "but my word will go. The chief will be glad to take in such experts as you are, especially as he has recently lost some good men."

"Lost them? Did they get pinched?"

"Yes, by Nick Carter."

"Huh!"

"You know of him, then?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Nobody, I suppose. He is a detective who has

come up since I left the country a good many years ago. They say he's a fiend for cleverness and courage, but I don't fear him."

"Nor do we, but we'd like to see him out of the way."

"You shall. That's all arranged."

"Another flash of lightning came, and Gaylord started a little, as he saw that each of the detectives was pointing a revolver at him.

Nick laughed.

"Speaking of who's got the advantage," he said, "I reckon it's about hoss and hoss, ain't it? Now, guvnor, we want to talk this thing out fair and square, but a roof on a rainy night is no place to do it."

"You're right."

"Will you come down to our den? It's the top flat in the next building."

"You are two to my one," answered Gaylord, "but I'll do it, for if you'll listen to me you'll see that it's for your interest to whack up."

"All right. I propose that each one of us puts up his gun."

By the light of another flash, Gaylord saw the detectives pocketing their weapons.

He did the same, and said:

"Lead on."

Nick stepped over the opening to the next roof, and Chick followed him.

"Look out for the open space," called Nick, warningly.

In the darkness they heard Gaylord approaching.

He had just put his foot on the low parapet of the roof when there came the most blinding flash.

On the instant there was a terrific crash and roar, and the air all around them seemed to be cracking and tearing into pieces.

Both Nick and Chick felt the sickly faintness that comes to all when they are in the very midst of a discharge of electricity.

They heard the falling of bricks and knew that a chimney within a few feet of them had been struck.

But they saw something that was far worse than an electric shock.

The flash that brought the tears to their eyes by its intense brightness gave them one glimpse of Gaylord with his foot upon the parapet, making ready to leap across.

In that brief instant they saw his body quiver with

the shock, saw him lose his balance, sway, try to draw back, and then plunge headlong.

There was a horrible sound, like a gasp and a groan of horror combined.

Then an instant of dreadful silence, followed by a heart-sickening thud from the pavement below.

"Good God!" whispered Chick, his blood freezing.

Nick stood perfectly still for a moment.

The roar of thunder died away, and there followed a series of short flashes without any loud report.

They saw the roofs before them with no living thing on them, save themselves.

They saw the edge of the open space, where a moment before the society thief had stood.

Then Nick stepped to the edge and looked down.

A flash revealed a body at the bottom, the arms spread out, the head curled under.

"Dead!" said Nick, gloomily, "and the best plan I ever made gone with him!"

Chick's response was a shudder.

"I've seen death a good many times before this," remarked the young man, after a pause, "but never anything that seemed quite so awful."

"It's the disappointment, my boy," said Nick. "Gaylord, of course, got no better than he deserved, but you and I were on the point of learning all about the smartest, biggest gang we ever played against, and now we've got to begin all over again, because of an accident—or was it the hand of fate?"

"I can't tell, but there's no doubt that your scheme had worked perfectly. He was really convinced that we were thieves—"

"And so would have told us everything, introduced us to the chief, and— But regrets are useless. Come on. We must finish the affair of the night in another way."

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

PATSY REPORTS.

They went down to the street through their building; but without pausing at the flat.

It was then raining heavily, but that they didn't mind, and, after a short walk through the neighborhood, they found a policeman.

"Do you know us?" asked Nick, abruptly.

"Can't say I do," returned the officer.

"I am Nick Carter, and this is Chick—"

"Oh!"

"Come with us, and we will show you something."

He followed them to the narrow alley between the buildings and saw Gaylord's body.

"Crook?" inquired the policeman.

"Yes," answered Nick. "If you will stand guard, we will report the matter at your station."

"All right, Mr. Carter."

When they had explained the situation at the station, but without telling the sergeant that Gaylord was connected with a gang, Nick looked at his watch.

"Not yet one," he said. "It isn't likely that everybody has got away from Mrs. Van Pelt's. I saw both the Beldens and the Wendells there. Let's look in on them, Chick, and see if we can wind up this part of the business before going home."

They took a cab to Mrs. Van Pelt's, and, as Nick had thought likely, found that the Beldens and Wendells were still there.

The other guests had gone, but Mrs. Van Pelt had asked these to remain a few minutes.

Knowing that they had been robbed also, she wanted to talk over her loss with them.

It was just after she had told them that her jewel cabinet had been rifled that a servant came in to say that a policeman wanted to see Mrs. Van Pelt.

"Admit him at once," she cried.

The policeman came in.

"I was sent to tell you," he said, "that the carriage in which Carlo Spontini left your house was traced to the house of Nicholas Carter, the detective, and that the only person who got out there was Miss Ida Jones, Mr. Carter's lady assistant. Mr. Carter himself, who was probably the Italian, went somewhere else. The captain says you'd better not worry."

Mrs. Van Pelt looked at Detective Foster, who had also stayed at her request.

"It must be all right," he said, smiling. "I almost feel as if the jewels were already back in the house."

Foster spoke more truly than he imagined, for at that moment another servant came in with Nick's and Chick's cards.

Of course, the detectives were admitted, and Nick came in, looking so grave that Mrs. Van Pelt gave a cry of alarm.

"Mr. Carter!" she gasped, "have you failed?"

"Badly, madam," he answered, "but my assistant will be pleased to restore your property."

Chick then took his knotted handkerchief from a pocket and spread it open on a table.

There were cries of excitement as Mrs. Van Pelt recognized every article that had been stolen.

"Ah! sir," said Mr. Belden, "I wish you could have done as much for us."

"So do I," responded Nick, taking out his own handkerchief. "I presume a little will be better than nothing. If you and Mr. and Mrs. Wendell will look over these things you may find some articles that belong to you."

He laid out the gems that had been hidden in Gaylord's Indian club.

The others gathered round, with many exclamations of surprise and joy.

In two minutes they had picked out their pieces, and it was found that Nick had recovered every article that had been stolen from both houses.

In answer to a question, he said:

"The thief was Melville Gaylord. The police now have charge of him."

For a moment the ladies and gentlemen were so shocked that they were speechless. Nick took advantage of the pause to apologize to Foster.

"I was deeply sorry," he said, "to treat you as I did, but I couldn't see any other way."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Carter," returned Foster, grasping his hand. "I am immensely pleased that you caught the rascal."

"And so are we," said Mrs. Van Pelt. "I congratulate you, Mr. Carter, on your brilliant success."

"Success!" echoed Nick, with a bitterness of tone that surprised all of them. "I beg your pardon, madam, and thank you for your kindness, but I feel as if I had failed miserably. Melville Gaylord is dead. I would give a fortune if he had lived a half-hour longer."

They begged him to explain, but he politely declined to do so.

"The newspapers and police will tell you how Gaylord met his end. I have still a great deal to do, and you must excuse me. Good-night."

The detectives went away, but it may be said here that this was not the last they heard of the stolen jewels. A day or two later Nick received a handsome check from Mr. Belden, representing the amounts that each of the three families had given toward rewarding him for his work.

"This money," he said to Chick, when he received

it, "we will use for the expense in hunting for Higher Up."

Meantime, he had already begun his search anew. When they arrived at home, after leaving Mrs. Van Pelt's, they found Patsy waiting for them.

"I can't tell you as much as I wish I could," said the young detective, "but it's a starter. I found the locksmith who did the job. A man such as Allen describes brought him a key and asked him to make a duplicate.

"There's no hurry," this man said, "but I'd like to have the use of this key while you are at work."

"So the locksmith took an impression of the key in wax, made a duplicate next day, and the man called and paid for it day before yesterday."

"Did you examine the house?" asked Nick.

"Sure! I found that the previous occupants had planted morning glories all along the back of the house, and beside the fence that incloses their back yard. The vines grow on strings, you know. As the vines are full grown, a man could crawl between them and the wall of the house on one side of the yard, and the fence on the other without being seen from windows."

"I am sure he went out that way, for at the end of the bank of morning glories there is a loose board in the fence. He could pull that aside and get into the yard of the house that faces on the other street."

"That is an apartment-house, and neither of the ground floor flats is occupied—"

"That's clear, then," interrupted Nick. "He got into the apartment-house, watched his chance and probably changed his disguise in the basement, and then walked out quietly. Nobody would notice him."

"Well," he added, with a long breath, "as I said to Chick, we've got to begin all over again. The next step will be to find the man who fired at me and almost hit my wife."

How this next step was taken, will be told in No. 262 of this weekly.

FUN FOR EVERYBODY! .

This is where all of the funniest stories sent in by the contestants in the new contest will appear. Here are some right off the bat. Read them, boys, and then send in your own.

We expect to make these pages the funniest that were ever printed. The boys who read them will get a fund of stories that will keep their friends laughing for a week.

A Shrewd Yankee.

(By John Brezee, Lowell, Mass.)

"What do you charge for boarding?" asked a tall, green mountain boy, as he walked up to the bar of a second-rate hotel in Boston. "What do you ask a week for boarding and lodging?"

"Five dollars and a half."

"Five dollars and a half! That's too much; but I suppose you will allow for the times I'm absent from dinner and supper?"

"Certainly; thirty-seven and a half cents for each meal?"

Here the conversation ended, and the Yankee took up his quarters for two weeks. During this time he lodged and breakfasted at the hotel, but did not take either dinner or supper, saying his business detained him in another portion of the city. At the expiration of the two weeks he again went up to the bar and said:

"S'pose we settle that account, I'm going in a few minutes."

The landlord handed him the bill.

"Two weeks' board at \$5.50 a week, \$11.

"Here, stranger," said the Yankee, "this is not right."

"How so, sir?"

"You've made a mistake. You've not deducted the time I was absent from dinner and supper—fourteen days, two meals per day—twenty-eight meals at thirty-seven and a half cents each, \$11.50. If you've not the fifty cents in change that's due me I'll take a drink, if you please, and the balance in cigars!"

Beating the Barbers.

(By Walter Downs, Toledo, Ohio.)

A man who had been nearly talked to death by loquacious barbers went into a shop the other day and handed one of the artists a card bearing the words:

"Give me an easy shave."

The barber motioned him to a chair, and then turning around, winked at his fellow laborers and said:

"Here's a deaf and dumb 'un, boys, wants an easy shave."

"Well, if you gash him he can't talk," replied one who was waiting for "next."

"No, you bet he can't," returned the first. "An easy shave be blowed! Why, he's got bristles like a Texas boar, and his skin looks tougher than a canal mule's."

The boys laughed, and the operator, who in the meantime had lathered the man's face, indulged in further comments as he urged the razor over the facial territory before him.

"What a nose that is," said he. "If he should sneeze where would I be?"

"Well, his cheek is harder than a razor hone."

"Do you want us to help hold his nose while you go over his lips, Johnny?" asked another of the idle razor-wielders.

"Don't know but what I will want a little help."

"Be careful and don't drop your razor down his ear or you'll lose it," admonished another.

"What a dirty head he's got," observed Johnny, as he ran his fingers through the man's hair. "I say, some of you fellows write a card and ask him if he don't want a shampoo."

The card was written and presented to the man, who shook his head at it, and, the job being finished, he arose from the chair.

"It's all right, boys," said he, as he laid down his fifteen cents; "I don't mind your talk any. I could stand it first-rate, so long as you didn't say anything about baseball, third term, or the Whisky Ring frauds."

He disappeared, and those barbers sat down and thought about him.

A Dutchman at the Races.

(By Paul Watt, Danville, Conn.)

Dey vas hafing some lifely dimes ould to der "mile dracks" der oder day, und Koppitz ask me didn't I vould like to go ould und see der races; so I dells Katrina I vas going to been avay a leedle while, und to take goot gare off der shop while I vas gone, und I vent me ould mit him. Der vas plenty of drotters dere, und pooty goot horses dey vas, too.

Von off der horses vas galled der "Goldschmidt Maid," und she was to drot "against dime," as der horsemen say. She was a pooty mare, I dells you, und dey gifes her dree gheers ven she game ould.

Der beoples vas petting deir money all aboud us, und der creenpacks vas shanging hants pooty lifely, und eferypody seemed egisdet aboud deir favorid horses.

Ve got us a goot blace oup py der shudges stant, vere ve Gould see der horses ven dey game in, und I vas schtanting mit Korpitz dalking, ven I hears a yellow schust pehint me say to his freint.

"I dells you, Shonny, der Maid vas in schplendit gondi-

No. 7.—CONTINUOUS BEHEADINGS.

Our oars with lily-pads are ——
 Our eager hands the blossoms ——
 Each cries, "Dull care away ——"
 And echo answers "—.—."

Submitted by Albert Schmertz, Pittsburg, Pa.

No. 8.—RIDDLE.

I paint without colors, I fly without wings,
 I people the air with most fanciful things;
 I hear sweet music where no sounds are heard,
 And eloquence moves me nor utters a word.
 The past and the present together I bring.
 The distant and near gather under my wing.
 Far swifter than lightning my wonderful flight
 Through the sunshine of day or the darkness of night.
 And those who would find me, must find me, indeed,
 As this picture they scan, and this posey read.

Submitted by Jerry Boulding, Beavers Falls, Pa.

No. 9.—DIAMOND.

1. A consonant.
2. A border of lace upon the inner edge of a bonnet.
3. A three-masted vessel.
4. Resembling tiles.
5. Makes flat.
6. Delayed.
7. Viands.
8. Like blood.
9. A consonant.

Submitted by Harry C. Pray, Roxbury, Mass.

No. 10.—RIDDLE.

I am the center of gravity, hold a prominent position in Vienna, and as I am foremost in every victory, am allowed by all to be invaluable; always out of tune, yet ever in voice; invisible, though clearly seen in the midst of a river; I have three associates in vice, and could name three who are in love with me. Still, it is in vain you seek me, for I have long been in heaven, and even admit to lie embalmed in the grave.

Submitted by Arthur Bass, St. Louis, Mo.

No. 11.—OBLIQUE RECTANGLE.

1, a letter; 2, one of the signs of the zodiac; 3, that which must come to all at the end of life; 4, additional;

5, the most prominent Biblical kings of the time of the birth of Christ; 6, a native of ancient Rome; 7, little valleys; 8, at no time; 9, to cut; 10, to reverence; 11, carousal; 12, to revolt; 13, one having a leprous disease; 14, an acidous fruit, resembling an orange; 15, actors' parts, especially in dramas; 16, beneath; 17, instead; 18, purgatory; 19, Satan; 20, a male name; 21, ears; 22, the homes of birds; 23, a stairway; 24, parts of the body, not front or back; 25, cuts, as grain, with a sickle; 26, a small bowl, with long handle attached, used in preparing or partaking of food; 27, pertaining to the sun; 28, pertaining to a navy; 29, scoffs; 30, an ungulate, ruminating South American mammal, allied to the camel, but smaller and without a hump; 31, to mash; 32, remains of any fire; 33, a one-masted vessel, with fore and aft rig, generally having a centerboard; 34, having sobriety; 35, to caress; 36, a letter.

Submitted by "Knave's Ink," Wilmington, N. C.

No. 12.—DIAMOND.

- 1, a letter; 2, over (contraction); 3, possessed; 4, restores, repays or returns; 5, having nature of reeds; 6, not wet, moist or damp; 7, a letter.

Submitted by "Knave's Ink," Wilmington, N. C.

Answers to Last Week's Puzzles:

No. 1.—Honesty is the best policy.

No. 2.—Man's age, 45; lady's, 15.

No. 3.—Street & Smith, publishers.

No. 4.— 4×4 equals 16. Nine halves multiplied by 16 equals 72. One-third of 72 is 24. Seven halves of 24 is 84. One-third of 84 equals 28 years, her age.

No. 5.—Coal.

No. 6.—The wine being in the eight gallon keg, you fill the three gallon keg from the eight and empty the three gallon keg into the five. Refill the three from the eight, then finish filling the five from the three, which will leave one gallon in the three gallon keg. Then empty the five into the eight, then empty the one gallon into the five, then refill the three from the eight and empty the three into the five. You will now have four gallons in the five gallon keg and four gallons in the eight gallon keg.

Stamp and Coin Department.

Each week, in this department, you will find special articles about stamps and coins. We also give an opportunity to our readers to make exchanges of coins, as well as stamps, through this department free of cost, and we will answer, in a special column, any questions our readers would like to ask on these subjects. Address all communications to the "Stamp and Coin Department."

Stamp Collecting As An Investment.

In making a collection with the investment object in view, remember one thing, that its value is greatly enhanced by the perfect condition of the stamps therein contained.

Never put a damaged stamp in your collection unless

it is a rarity, and then only when slightly damaged, and replace it with a perfect copy as soon as possible. Damaged stamps are practically worthless, and cannot, as a rule, be sold for one-tenth of their catalogue value.

Another thing to be watched is the centering of stamps. A stamp is said to be "well centered" when the

design is directly in the center of the paper, with an even margin all around. Stamps "off center" are worth much less than those in perfect condition, so that they should always be secured well centered, if possible. Heavy cancellations also decrease the value of stamps. All these things should be borne in mind when amassing a collection which will be a sure investment, and if our suggestions are faithfully carried out, we believe the predictions made above will be more than realized.

CORRESPONDENCE.

W. O.—Your coins have no premium value.

G. M.—The ordinary half dollars of 1854 and 1858 command no premium.

N. S.—The dealers charge twenty-five cents for an 1831 dime in good condition.

S. H.—The stamp you illustrate is a twenty-cent Belgium issued in 1866. It is worth one cent.

E. D.—The stamp you describe is probably the two cent of 1878 with head of Liberty. It is not worth anything.

B. M.—A crisp, new ten cent note of 1864, portrait of Washington, and value in gold at the sides, is worth thirty-five cents.

B. W.—The 1883 V nickels hardly command a premium. Certainly we know of no one who wants to pay over face value for them.

L. I.—Your coins are all very common. A coin so old that the date is worn off and the inscription illegible is rarely worth the keeping.

M. P.—A dollar of 1796 is worth three dollars. One of 1798, good as your drawing seems to infer, two dollars and fifty cents. The 1811 half dollar sells for eighty-five cents.

S. N.—Your English half penny with date 1700 must be one of William III., 1695-1702. The reverse shows Britannia seated. If the piece is in good condition it is worth half a dollar.

L. P.—A good 1810 cent is worth half a dollar; 1811 cent, one dollar and a half; 1826 and 1828 cents, twenty-five cents. Your other pieces, while nice for a collection, command no premium.

N. S.—Your rubbing is from an old Roman coin, but is not distinct enough to be classified. If you will send it to us with a prepaid envelope to your address, we will return it with the information you ask.

B. M.—There are two varieties of the 1836 half dollar, one has "E pluribus unum," 50c., and lettered edge; the other has no motto, reads 50 cents, and has milled edge. The former sells for seventy-five cents, and the

latter for three dollars in good condition. 1893 Columbian half dollars are selling for seventy-five cents at the dealers.

A. B.—We do not know of any "St. Louis Expedition stamp." If you mean the two cent Omaha, it has no value at present.

B. E.—All of the stamps you describe are common and worth very little. The envelope stamp is a Columbian, and the three cent locomotive was issued in 1869.

H. M.—An 1843 quarter, if fine, is worth half a dollar. The Mexican silver coin is a one-fourth real, and this design was used between 1841 and 1861. They usually bring 15 cents. Mo is the mint mark of the city of Mexico.

N. A.—Your rubbing is taken from a Bank of England dollar, 1804. This was struck during the reign of George III., and, as far as we know, is the only purely English coin with the word dollar on. It is worth two dollars and fifty cents.

A. S. A.—The one, two, five, eight and ten cent stamps of the United States were surcharged "Porto Rico." Afterward the one and two cents were surcharged "Puerto Rico." The spelling on the higher values was not changed.

N. B.—An American half dollar of 1809 is worth seventy-five cents, and an einreich thaler 1778 of Frederick II. (1740-86), of Germany, is worth two dollars. The "model penny" and the ordinary half penny and pennies of Victoria are all common.

R. T.—1849 dime, twenty-five cents. Your other copper rubbings are from common Canadian, English and French coins. The one you are more particularly anxious about is a French double tournois of Henry IV. (1590-1610), 1608, and is worth thirty cents.

A. B.—There are several varieties of the five cent, fifty cent and one dollar values of United States Internal Revenue stamps of 1866. This is dependent upon the inscription in the lower label of the stamp. They vary in value from one cent each for the common ones to five dollars each for the rarest.

F. P.—Your coin is a two real of Charles III. (1760-89) of Spain. The mint mark Mo., on the reverse, shows that it was coined in Mexico for use in that country, then belonging to Spain. The arms on the reverse are those of Spain, Lions and Castles, for Leon and Castile, the two original provinces of Spain.

P. B.—The cents of 1800, 1805, 1807 and 1808 are worth respectively, one dollar, twenty-five, seventy-five, fifty and sixty-five cents; 1818, twenty-five cents; 1831, thirty cents; 1837, 1845 and 1847, fifteen cents each; 1850, 1851 and 1853, five cents each. These prices are for the coins in good condition.

NEW PRIZE CONTEST.

“It is to Laugh!”

What is the funniest story you ever heard, boys? What's the latest joke? Do you know any good ones? If you do, here is a chance for you to win some dandy prizes.

We are going to give away these Prizes to the boys who send us the Funniest Stories or the Best Jokes.

The Three Boys Who Send Us the Funniest Stories

will each receive a first-class, up-to-date Banjo. These banjos are beautiful instruments and are warranted in every particular. They have 11-inch calf heads, walnut necks, and veneered finger boards, with celluloid inlaid position dots, raised frets, twenty-four nickel brackets and wired edge. These instruments can be easily mastered, and every boy should jump at the opportunity to win one.

The Five Boys Who Send Us the Next Funniest Stories

will each receive a complete Magic Trick Outfit, including the Magician's Mill, the Columbus Egg, the Enchanted Money Box, the Magician's Whip, the Enchanted Rose, the Ghostly Finger, the Magic Box, the Great Transformer, the Phantom Ring, the Magic Dice, and the Fire Eater. Besides all the magic tricks, the outfit includes a private instruction book for the use of the operator.

The Ten Boys Who Send Us the Next Funniest Stories

will each receive a pair of heavy Military Regulation Leggings, just the thing for winter wear while coasting, or skating, or for tramping the snow. Warm and durable. Made of extra heavy brown canvas, with four straps.

Send in your stories at once, boys. All the best ones will be published on another page. Watch for them! Some of the funniest stories, jolliest jokes and side-splitting grinds ever heard are going to appear there.

This contest will close February 1. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

To become a contestant for these prizes, you must cut out the Prize Contest Coupon, printed herewith; fill it out properly, and mail it to NICK CARTER WEEKLY, care of Street & Smith, 238 William St., New York City, together with your story. No story will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

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